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THE RELATION OF THE EXTENSION SERVICE TO ACTION AGENCIES

OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT*

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I do not know of any topic that has been the subject of more extensive and persistent discussion among us in the past several years than the topic assigned to me by your program committee, namely, the relation of the Extension Service to the action agencies of the Federal Government. I am sure that we would all be happy if we could define this relation in such a conclusive manner as to terminate the necessity of such discussion and to let us concentrate on getting accomplished for the benefit of farm people the several jobs involved. However, when such discussion has been organized so as to enable us, step by step, to build up constructive understanding and agreement between the Extension Service and any given agency, the result has been most helpful. The steps that have been taken along this line, jointly with your Committee on Extension Organization and Policy and the several subcommittees set up by it since the meeting of the Land-Grant College Association a year ago, are going a long way toward improved cooperation with one agency after another. This type of activity, I believe, is of incalculable benefit in reducing to practical terms many of the problems of relationship which the Committee on Relations of the Land-Grant College Association and the Department have had to consider.

The first of these subcommittees of the Committee on Extension Organization and Policy to function was the one on relations in the general field of the Soil Conservation Service. It made its report under the chairmanship of Director Anderson of Colorado. This report provided the basis of discussion in the succeeding regional and State conferences of representatives of the Extension Service and the Soil Conservation Service, leading to working agreements between the two agencies. At these conferences, the members of the subcommittee

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and its chairman, Director Anderson, in particular, gave untiring and most effective assistance. Since the last meeting of the Land-Grant College Association, subcommittees have been set up in the fields of land use planning, marketing, rural housing, and rural electrification. The Committee on Extension Organization and Policy, also, authorized setting up at an appropriate time similar subcommittees in the fields of agricultural adjustment and of rural rehabilitation, farm ownership, and tenancy relations. It is, of course, a major objective of these several committees to review the relationship of the Extension Service with the several agencies involved in conjunction with representatives of the agencies and of the Federal Extension Service. I feel that Director Brehm, Chairman of the Committee on Extension Organization and Policy, and his associates deserve the highest praise for consistently forwarding this course of action. The activities of these subcommittees are proving most fruitful of understanding and accord between the Extension Service and the several action agencies. The Federal Extension Service, in particular, has been aided immeasurably in its efforts in the relationship field by this type of activity.

Today we are on the threshold of a new and trying period of service to farm people. It seems certain that adjustments will have to be made and activities will have to be engaged in far beyond anything we have previously experienced. How we are to meet these situations becomes of incalculable importance to American farm life. In recent statements made by Secretary Wickard and Commissioner Chester Davis of the National Defense Commission, both have emphasized the opinion that the Federal Department of Agriculture and cooperating agencies have the organizational machinery needed to handle all new activities in relation to agriculture that the changing world situation and the national defense effort may call for. This means that the various agencies that we now have for servicing agriculture will absorb, in the main, these activities. This particular occasion, therefore, is a singularly appropriate time to take stock of the situation and consider what may be the obligation of the Extension Service to farm people in relation to the activities of the several action agencies.

I want to reiterate that this period on which we are entering is bound to be a period of considerable uncertainty and one in which frequent adjustments will have to be made. Conditions may develop which will call for substantial, if not radical, changes in policies and programs. Undoubtedly, we have to be prepared, when the occasion arises, for prompt and compelling action. To this end, our people must be adequately informed and of a mind to approve such action when it is proposed. Furthermore, there must be complete harmony and cooperation between the agencies involved in such action. Otherwise, there may be a failure of accomplishment at a time of crisis that may be disastrous both to farm people and to the Nation. I cannot emphasize this thought too strongly.

One of the most striking contributions to the program of the recent National Outlook Conference in Washington was an informal talk by Leonard Elhurst of England on the effect on British agriculture of the German attack on the British Isles. There have been drastic changes in the conduct of British agriculture. An increase in the minimum wage that could be paid the farm laborer forces an almost revolutionary adjustment on the part of farm operators. Again, to insure maximum production, tractors and other improved farm machinery were placed in use by the Government on farms which had hitherto not had the benefit of such equipment. To maintain feed supplies, steps were taken to discourage the continued maintenance of large commercial poultry flocks and larger herds of hogs. The Government, with present shipping hazards, found it best to import their eggs and meat, rather than to ship in feeds which took much more tonnage. In the interest of economical production, all farms were classified as to production and management. As a result, farms which were not being efficiently operated were either put under the management of farmers on adjoining farms or new managers were placed on them. Finally, all fully employed farm labor was exempted from military service, so that there might be no slackening of farm production.

We hope, of course, that in the United States there will be no occasion for placing such drastic controls on agricultural operation. Nevertheless, we must realize that the situation resulting from a world at war, even though we ourselves are not directly involved in the military conflict, is already seriously affecting agricultural production and farm life in this country and will continue increasingly to do so. Let me name some prospective developments that are calculated to require urgent consideration and action.

We face the possibility of the drastic reduction of our export trade in certain important cash crops. This development hits a hard and immediate blow at farm income and farm buying power. It involves possible adjustments in every step of the production of such crops from financing the crop to laying it down at the consumer's door. Sharp adjustments in the volume of crops now grown, growing new kinds of crops, changing methods of production, marketing, and distribution -- in all these and doubtless many other ways we will try to maintain farm income and buying power. This effort may well exhaust the total resources of science, governmental action, and the intelligence and business abilities of our farm people, unless conducted with vigor, harmony, and precision. It will be seen, I think, that in this field there often will be urgent need for resolute and united action on the part of every farmer and every agency involved.

We face the necessity of working out economic and trade relations with the other countries of the Western Hemisphere, which in one way or another will tend to affect drastically our national economy, including agriculture. This is not a matter we can be thinking about

for an indefinite time. The answer is being called for now. What can we do? If we know what seemingly ought to be done, will public opinion and sentiment support us?

We are confronted with the great desirability of maintaining on as high a level as possible the physical condition and morale of all our people, both of city and country. This is urged as an integral part of total defense. How can it be managed? How can we put farm products to this highly desirable use and at the same time have it compatible with the economic interest of the farmer? A national effort in this direction calls for answers, for adjustments, and for united action. How are we going to meet the situation? How will we do the job?

There are other matters, too, on which we have been working for many years and which I do not believe we are ready to abandon. I have pointed out that our No. 1 problem is the maintenance of farm income and buying power. Closely associated with it is the maintenance of living standards on the farm -- continued improvement in what the farm family can have in nutrition, in clothing, in housing, in health safeguards, and in educational, social, and recreational facilities. How can we continue to make progress in these directions? Which of these considerations are of the highest immediate importance?

The conservation of resources under these new conditions becomes more than ever urgent. It is all-embracing. We need to think of conservation in relation to the farm, not only as applied to the soil, to water, to the wood lot, to buildings and equipment, but applied as well to the health and strength of the individual, to community institutions and social life, to the opportunities the community offers to its young people, and to the traditions of the community, its setting, and its way of life. How much of this program can we carry forward as we proceed in our efforts to meet the crucial problems ahead?

The foregoing fragmentary sketch of some of the situations and problems that appear to be coming to us for consideration and action lead me to three definite conclusions. First, in servicing farm people in this period, we must think constantly of developments in the agricultural field in relation to resolving ourselves into a united and strongly fortified nation, with ability to defend ourselves adequately against foreign encroachment and against weakness and instability from within.

Second, there is a tremendous job to be done in acquainting farm people with the situations and problems involved and in preparing them to act unitedly and effectively when the occasion arises.

Third, we need to have an understanding between the several agencies and organizations operating in the agricultural field that will permit us to act without delay and with complete harmony as each situation or problem confronts us.

In the light of these conclusions, none of us who are associated with the Extension Service can fail, I am sure, to appreciate the opportunity that we have or the weight of the responsibility that is ours if we accept it for the period immediately ahead. Possibly we would do well at this point to review briefly our own development in the agricultural picture up to the present time. We recall that, immediately following the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, an agreement was reached between the Department and the land-grant colleges whereby the Cooperative Extension Service became the educational channel of the Department to farm people. From that time, the research findings of the Department were pooled with those within each State and made available to farmers and their families. As emergencies arose in the years that followed, the Department and the State agricultural colleges, in every case, cooperated in meeting the situation and in acquainting farm people with the measures that it was necessary to take. With the advent of the period that resulted in the authorization of the various action agencies of the Department with which this discussion is concerned, the Extension Service was called on to explain the purpose of these agencies to farm people, to help in setting up their local organization and, in many instances, to guide their activities until they were sufficiently well established to do this for themselves. The subsequent rapid growth and development of these agencies raised various problems of relationship and rapidly brought about urgent need for the harmonious coordination of their activities within each State and county in which they were in operation.

The Mount Weather conference of 1938, participated in by representatives of the Department and the State agricultural colleges, provided for the present land use planning program as a joint activity of the Department and the colleges. This was designed to enable farm people to work out the basis of a fundamental agricultural program for each State and county. The process set up included provision for the joint consideration in each county by farm people and the representatives of Department action agencies of the contributions each agency could make to the agricultural program recommended for the county. This process, as might be expected, is proving most helpful in bringing about in a natural and effective way the coordination of the activities of the several agencies in each county where the land use planning program is in operation.

Let us now consider the status and obligations of the county extension worker as they bear on the relation of the Extension Service to the action agencies. Frankly, I have no knowledge of any

governmental or semi-governmental organization that is so thoroughly localized and autonomous in its organization as the Extension Service. It is not Federally dominated. It is not even State dominated. The county extension worker makes himself to a very remarkable degree responsible to the farm people of his county for the determination of his activities and the program carried on in that particular county. This highly desirable relation to the people of his county he apparently maintains without failing in any degree to recognize his joint responsibility to the State college and the Federal Department and his obligations as a public official. In fact, within relatively broad limitations, the county extension worker, man or woman, comes as nearly being the representative of the farm people of his county as it is possible for an individual to be and at the same time maintain the status of a representative of the State agricultural college and the Federal Department of Agriculture.

In his work, as we know, the county extension agent seeks, first, to inform and to aid the farmer, farm woman, or farm boy or girl, to do for themselves on the farm or in the home the things which will bring about improvement and satisfaction in the business and life of the farm. Second, he encourages farm people in various communities of his county to engage in group efforts tending to the same objectives. Third, as the Federal and State governments have developed and provided facilities for giving farm people aid in improving their condition, the county extension worker on behalf of his farm people has sought to make such facilities as readily and practically available to his people as they could be made.

A county extension worker is a great deal more to the farm people of his or her county than an employed technician in the field of agriculture or home economics. The job was set up originally in such a fashion as to bring the extension work in close and intimate touch with the life of the farm people of the county. There are few county extension workers who have been in their counties for any length of time who have not become an integral part of the life and activities of the county and its people. Such an extension worker, in addition to being the technical adviser of the farm families of his county is recognized and sought after by many farm families as a sympathetic friend and trusted counselor. It is in this role that we must of necessity consider the county extension worker in his relation to the operation of the several action agencies of the Federal Government and the contribution that he can make to any national effort or program projected for the benefit of farm people. That the Extension Service and its county extension workers, subject as they are to so many diverse State and county viewpoints, have contributed as vitally and as largely as they have in the past several years to the conduct and efficacy of the several action programs of the Federal Government is a remarkable achievement and a real tribute to the ability of the extension worker in his dual role of representative of his people and of the State and Federal institutions with which he is associated.

I hope that what I have said about possible national situations, problems, and decisions that are likely soon to confront farm people, has emphasized sufficiently the urgent need for all agricultural agencies to pool their resources and work together in complete harmony and understanding. I hope, too, that what I have said of the functions and character of the Extension Service and the county extension agent suggests the important role they can play in the attempt to key the work of all agencies into a vital agricultural program for each State and county. The general pattern of relationship in the several States between the Extension Service and action agencies as they have been inaugurated has been that of mutual reinforcement and helpfulness in rendering service to farm people. How this relationship can be encouraged further and be made the basis of future cooperation on the part of the Extension Service and the several action agencies is a matter of deep concern to us all.

From the first setting up of these agencies, the Extension Service and the county extension agent, because of their intimate knowledge of the people and conditions in each county, have been depended on heavily in presenting the proposed functions and program of each new agency and in setting up its local organization. Likewise, in the future, we should assume, I think, that the Extension Service and each action agency involved will get together on each important new phase of activity undertaken and will cooperate in its presentation to the people. It would seem hardly necessary to suggest that any new and vital contribution to the agricultural program should have the benefit of the full support of the Extension Service and of its educational facilities.

The effort has been made rather consistently to provide each agency at State and county levels with such technical subject matter and advice as would strengthen the program of each agency and render it more definitely fitted to serve local needs. There have been instances in which, for various reasons, this service has not been so fully available or so fully utilized as would have been desirable. However, as each agency has become more stabilized and more permanent in character, the valuable aid which the Extension Service and the agricultural college can render in this field is being increasingly recognized and facilitated.

The land use planning program as it has become established and has begun to function is exercising a marked influence on the relation of the Extension Service to the action agencies and in making a more thorough integration of all activities feasible. How rapidly this program can be extended in its more intensive forms to counties not now benefiting from such activity is the most serious limitation to the helpful influence of this program on the full development of effective relations between the Extension Service and the several action agencies. I think we can agree that there can be no greater

advance in relationship between the Extension Service and the action agencies than the establishment in each county of a well-rounded, practical program for agriculture, to which each agency can contribute, in ways worked out with the counsel of the local farm people and having their approval and support. It would seem the part of wisdom to establish a county land use planning committee in every county and to provide for its effective operation.

Until the land use planning program can be fully utilized in all counties, there is much to be said for the practice now in vogue in a number of States and counties of regularly bringing together at State and county levels the representatives of the Extension Service and the several action agencies to review available facilities and assess the progress that is being made. Where this practice has not been established, it would seem that rather definite plans should be laid for so doing, in the interest of more harmonious and unified action.

As I have indicated, the hope for successful effort in meeting the various grave situations and problems that lie ahead is certain to be dependent, to a large degree, on the sympathetic understanding and approval of farm people of the conditions to be met and of the action it is proposed to take. As national data and information come down to the State Extension Service and the State organizations of the several action agencies, the desirability of reasonably frequent joint conferences and discussion of such material is evident. It would seem that in digesting and adapting such information to State use it is logical that the State Extension Service should take the initiative and work out with the several agencies the most effective methods of getting such information to farm people. It would seem that, in addition to using all the educational channels of the Extension Service, the action agencies as well can be most helpful by seeing to it that their field personnel in their farm contacts are well informed regarding the general situation and what is being done to meet it. One of the most important steps that we can take in the immediate future to insure unity in approach and action is to have all agencies and organizations in the agricultural field impressed with the general situation with which we are trying to cope and the contribution each agency is making.

We might well consider arranging conferences in a systematic way at State, district, and county levels, at which the representatives of all cooperating agencies would come together and, with the aid of the most competent leadership available, develop a well-rounded conception of the immediate situation and of the next steps to be taken. At such conferences, too, continual stimulus could be given to the encouragement of discussion of the issues confronting agriculture by local groups of farm people. Although we necessarily look to the Extension Service, in cooperation with the various farm

organizations and groups, to organize, develop, and stimulate discussion of the issues affecting farm people, there is everything to be gained by having the full cooperation and support of the several action agencies and the various groups and individuals with whom they have contact and through whom they work.

It follows naturally that we should give some thought at this point to an important element in the set-up of the action agencies -- namely, farmer participation. As we know, every action agency functions to a large degree in relation to the part played by farmers themselves in local organizations or on local committees that vary widely in character and function. We have prided ourselves in the Extension Service on the degree to which we have been able to aid farmer people to exercise leadership in every phase of activity in which they have been interested, both in adult and 4-H Club work. We have, in consequence, I believe, a genuine and sympathetic interest in what is being attempted in enabling farm people to take an active part in shaping and conducting the activities of action agencies.

We realize, I am sure, from extension experience, that this kind of participation by the farmers themselves, if properly organized, gives them an enthusiasm and interest in the effort and a loyalty to its purposes that cannot be attained in any other way. This group, too, can be most active and cooperative in the effort to bring about a more thorough public understanding of the over-all situation and ways of dealing with it. Whatever contribution in cooperation with any action agency we can make to the effectiveness and influence of such farmer participants will be, I am sure, time and effort most advantageously spent.

In considering these various areas of cooperation that lie in the field of relations with the action agencies, I trust we can agree that we ought to leave no stone unturned to insure the full effectiveness of all the agencies at the command of farm people in a unified and thoroughly harmonized attack on the situations and problems with which we shall have to deal. We have a tremendous job ahead. There is not too much time in which to prepare for it. Whatever we can do to strengthen further cooperation between the Extension Service and the action agencies, I think we should do immediately and with the determination to bring to farm people the full and united service of which we are capable.

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Action Agencies of the Federal Government

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